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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KARACHI 000861

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SUBJECT: MQM LEADERS OPTIMISTIC ABOUT ELECTIONS,  
RELATIONSHIP WITH PPP

Classified By: Kay Anske, Consul General, reasons 1.4 (c), (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM) leaders discussed their election plans at a meeting with the Consul General (CG) at their party headquarters on December 13, 2007. The MQM sees itself as a national party and will field candidates throughout Pakistan. Party leaders have been in close contact with the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and feel that the relationship between the two parties is improving. The Deputy Convener said he expected the elections to be peaceful but is concerned that the Jamaat Islami (JI) and the Awami National Party (ANP) may try to disrupt the process. MQM leaders appear confident about their election prospects and the party is likely to maintain its political control over Karachi. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM) Deputy Convener Dr. Farooq Sattar and other party leaders met with the Consul General (CG) at the party headquarters in Karachi, on December 13, 2007. Dr. Sattar described the party's political platform and election strategy. Their manifesto, titled &Empowerment for All, will be released later on December 13 and focuses on the Three Ps of Peace, Progress, and Prosperity. Their manifesto is consistent with their rhetoric and has sections on provincial autonomy and agrarian reforms along with education, health, and development.

¶3. (SBU) The party is trying to move beyond its traditional strongholds in urban Sindh and will field candidates across the nation. They have 122 National Assembly candidates and 226 Provincial Assembly with the majority from Sindh and Punjab. Dr. Sattar said the MQM is making solid progress in Punjab and claimed that Pakistan Muslim League (PML-Q) President Chaudhry Shujaat called him on December 12 to complain about growing MQM influence in the province.

¶4. (C) Dr. Sattar said the MQM has been in contact with the other political parties, especially the Pakistan People's Party (PPP). Altaf Hussain called Benazir Bhutto on October 19 to offer condolences for the suicide blast during her return rally. That conversation led to a rapprochement and the parties have been involved in unpublicized high level communication. While Benazir and Altaf have not spoken again, their close advisors in London have been in contact, said Sattar. Because of this communication, the PPP is now willing to deal with the MQM as a moderate national party instead of a regional adversary.

¶5. (C) The MQM has reached out to other political parties to a lesser extent. The Head of the Media Wing, Haider Abbas Rizvi, said that they are happy to engage with all political parties and have offered to form a committee with the other parties to monitor the elections and deal with complaints. If such committees were formed at the district level, he said, they could resolve difficulties and promote fair

elections.

¶ 16. (C) Dr. Sattar said they have not been in contact with the Jamaat Islami (JI), Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N), or the Awami National Party (ANP). He also said that part of the reason the JI is boycotting the elections is because people have grown weary of their religious ideology. Because of the boycott, the MQM is concerned that the JI might try to disrupt the elections. They are also concerned about violence from the ANP. Dr. Sattar said that ANP leader Shahi Syed is trying to exploit the ethnic fault line between Karachi's Pakhtoons and Mohajirs. These communities have a long history of violence that was exacerbated during Karachi's May 12 violence when close to fifty people were killed and the MQM was accused of targeting ANP supporters.

¶ 17. (SBU) The MQM leaders were confident in their electoral prospects. Members of their Central Committee stressed their organizational strengths and large number of party workers and supporters. They hope to station two volunteer polling agents at each polling booth at each polling station in Sindh and will rely on their workers to get people out to vote. The party is organized vertically through the district, town, and street level and those in charge at each level will facilitate the voters.

¶ 18. (SBU) Dr. Sattar said their workers will also help maintain the peace and that they have been instructed not to respond to any provocations. Along with international observers and the media, their workers will also promote free and fair elections. While it is unlikely all polling stations will be free from fraud, Dr. Sattar stressed that the losing parties should accept the results and not falsely claim the election was rigged.

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¶ 19. (C) COMMENT: The leaders' electoral optimism is well founded. The MQM is the best-organized party in Karachi and is best able to bring its supporters out to the polls. If the JI boycotts the elections, the MQM could sweep the elections in the city. However, a boycott could result in JI supporters interfering with the electoral process and lead to violence between these bitter rivals. There is also a real possibility of violence between the ANP and the MQM. Pakhtoons and Mohajirs have a violent history in Karachi and the ANP holds the MQM responsible for the deaths of their party workers on May 12.

ANSKE